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PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS

Proposed programme of work and organizational modalities for the open-ended ad hoc Intergovernmental Forum on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/65 of 25 July 1997, by which the Council decided that the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) should hold its first (organizational) session in New York from 1 to 3 October 1997. The report is intended to assist Governments in scheduling the work programme of IFF; in deciding on the modalities of its work, including the election and designation of officers; in making recommendations to the Council on the number, venue and duration of its substantive sessions; and in considering dividing its work between in-session working groups.

2. The report provides suggestions with respect to the possible clustering of the Forum's programme of work; the number of its sessions; its work schedule; and the allocation of topics for each session. The General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, charged the Forum with the task of identifying the possible elements of and working towards consensus on international arrangements and mechanisms, for example, a legally binding instrument on all types of forests (A/S-19/29, annex, para. 40). The report points out some of the constraints that Governments need to take into account when deciding on the content, schedule and allocation of the Forum's programme of work. The Forum has been requested to report on its achievements to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh and eighth sessions.

I. BACKGROUND

3. The General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, recognized that the "management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests are a crucial factor in economic and social development, in environmental protection and in the planet's life-support system. Forests are one of the major reservoirs of biological diversity; they act as carbon sinks and reservoirs; and they are a significant source of renewable energy, particularly in the least developed countries. Forests are an integral part of sustainable development and are essential to many indigenous people and other forest-dependent people practising traditional lifestyles, forest owners and local communities, many of whom possess important traditional forest-related knowledge" (A/S-19/29, annex, para. 37).

4. The General Assembly acknowledged that "to maintain the momentum generated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests process and to facilitate and encourage the holistic, integrated and balanced intergovernmental policy dialogue on all types of forests in the future, which continues to be an open, transparent and participatory process, requires a long-term political commitment to sustainable forest management worldwide" (A/S-19/29, annex, para. 39).

5. Consequently, the General Assembly decided "to continue the intergovernmental policy dialogue on forests through the establishment of an ad hoc open-ended Intergovernmental Forum on Forests under the aegis of the Commission on Sustainable Development to work in an open, transparent and

participatory manner, with a focused and time-limited mandate, and charged with, inter alia:

"(a) Promoting and facilitating the implementation of the Panel's proposals for action;

"(b) Reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests;

"(c) Considering matters left pending as regards the programme elements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, in particular trade and environment in relation to forest products and services, transfer of technology and the need for financial resources" (A/S-19/29, annex, para. 40).

6. In addition, the General Assembly decided that "the Forum should also identify the possible elements of and work towards consensus on international arrangements and mechanisms, for example, a legally binding instrument. The Forum will report on its work to the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1999. Based on that report, and depending on the decision of the Commission at its eighth session, the Forum will engage in further action on establishing an intergovernmental negotiation process on new arrangements and mechanisms or a legally binding instrument on all types of forests" (A/S-19/29, annex, para. 4).

7. Taking into account the decision of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, the Economic and Social Council, by resolution 1997/65, decided to establish, under the aegis of the Commission on Sustainable Development, an ad hoc open-ended Intergovernmental Forum of Forests, which would report to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session, in 2000.

8. By the same resolution, the Council decided that the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests should hold its first (organizational) session in New York from 1 to 3 October 1997 so that the preparations for substantive sessions could start without delay. The Council also decided that the Forum at its first (organizational) session should schedule its work programme, decide on the modalities of its work, including the election and designation of officers, and recommend to the Council the number, venue and the duration of its substantive session, which could be up to two weeks each. Recognizing the wide range of issues to be addressed, the Council further decided that the Forum might consider dividing its work between in-session working groups, on the understanding that no more than two working groups would meet simultaneously.

II. PARTICIPATION AND MODALITIES OF WORK

9. It is proposed that intergovernmental organizations as well as the full range of non-governmental organizations and other major groups participate as observers in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, on an open-ended and fully participatory basis, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

10. Furthermore the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests could draw in particular on the resources and technical expertise of the informal high-level Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests and other relevant organizations within and outside the United Nations system, as well as secretariats of relevant conventions, with appropriate contributions from non-governmental organizations. The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests may also wish to encourage inputs from major groups in all the activities in its programme of work.

11. Considering the complexities of the topics included in its mandate and in view of the fruitful contributions made by a large number of government-sponsored initiatives in support of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) process, IFF may wish to consider welcoming any proposals that may be made by Governments to organize expert meetings or to conduct studies in support of the Forum's work and may in particular consider welcoming regional approaches.

III. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK

12. In the light of Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/65, the Forum may wish to cluster its work into four categories as proposed below:

CATEGORY I

Promoting and facilitating the implementation of IPF's proposals for action, and reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests

(a) Promote and facilitate implementation. For example, consider the launching of programmes by Governments, United Nations agencies and other international organizations, and major groups, on which consensus was developed by IPF; consider appropriate mechanisms for the mobilization of institutional, human and financial resources and capacity-building; and encourage the development of voluntary codes of conduct for the private sector;

(b) Monitor progress in implementation. For example, consider mechanisms and methodologies for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress; and consider progress in implementation by Governments (at the national, subregional and regional levels), United Nations agencies and other international organizations, and major groups.

CATEGORY II

Considering matters left pending as regards the programme elements of IPF, in particular trade and environment in relation to forest products and services, and the need for financial resources

(a) Consider matters left pending on finance. Consider the feasibility of establishing an international fund to support activities for sustainable forest management; and explore innovative ways both to use existing financial mechanisms more effectively and to generate new and additional public and private financial resources;

(b) Consider matters left pending on trade and environment. Consider a possible agreement with respect to trade in forest products from all types of forests, based on non-discriminatory rules and procedures; and consider the question of the relationship between obligations under international agreements and national measures, including those actions imposed by subnational jurisdictions.

CATEGORY III

International arrangements and mechanisms to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests

Identify elements, build a global consensus and engage in further action. Identify the possible elements of and work towards consensus on international arrangements and mechanisms, for example, a legally binding instrument on all types of forests. Based on the report submitted to and depending on the decision taken by the Commission at its eighth session, the Forum will engage in further action on establishing an intergovernmental negotiation process on new arrangements and mechanisms or a legally binding instrument on all types of forests.

CATEGORY IV

Other international priorities on forest-related issues

(a) Examine research, technology development and improved utilization. For example, examine such issues as mechanisms for priority-setting; improved coordination and application of forest science, research results, traditional forest-related knowledge, technology and technical knowledge for local sustainable forest development; and the enhanced use of technology transfer, extension services and information systems for improved utilization of wood and non-wood forest products and services;

(b) Examine meeting future needs for goods, services and social requirements. For example: examine such issues as wood and energy; the future supply of and demand for wood and non-wood forest products and services; the reduction of wasteful consumption of forest goods and services; the rehabilitation of forest cover in environmentally critical areas; and collaboration, local participation and benefit and cost sharing.

IV. SUGGESTED WORK SCHEDULE AND ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

13. The organizational matters that need to be addressed by the Forum include the election of its officers at the first (organizational) session. The Forum may wish to consider a bureau structure similar to that of IPF, namely, two co-chairmen and three vice-chairmen.

14. It is suggested that IFF hold three substantive sessions. The scheduling of the first of those sessions should allow adequate time for the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General. The other two substantive sessions should be so scheduled as to allow IFF to provide timely reports to the Commission at its

seventh and eighth sessions, in 1999 and 2000, respectively. The Forum may wish to decide on the duration of the sessions and to establish in-session working groups, no more than two to be scheduled to meet simultaneously. Within these parameters and in view of the above proposal for the programme of work, the following schedule for the sessions is suggested:

	Dates	Venue	Duration
Organizational session			
First session	1-3 October 1997	New York	3 days
Substantive session			
Second session	To be determined	To be determined	Up to 2 weeks
Third session	To be determined	To be determined	Up to 2 weeks
Fourth session	To be determined	To be determined	Up to 2 weeks

15. After a decision has been made on the Forum's programme of work and session schedule, the work schedule and selection of programme elements to be dealt with at each session will need careful consideration in order to make the most effective and efficient use of resources and the Forum's time. The work schedule suggested in the annex below is proposed on the understanding that all categories are open for discussion until the Forum at its fourth session, approves its report for submission to the Commission at its eighth session, in 2000.

16. It may be desirable to continue the practice employed during the IPF process of being able to accord policy consideration to every programme element through either initial or substantive discussion at individual sessions of the Forum. However, in view of constraints of time and resources, the Forum may wish to seriously consider the advisability of preparing, at appropriate sessions, preliminary draft conclusions and proposals for action on some of the programme elements and subsequently to reconsider them collectively at the fourth session for inclusion in the report to the Commission at its eighth session. In this context it should be noted that the Forum's interim report, to be submitted to the Commission at its seventh session, in 1999, should be prepared at the Forum's third session.

17. The allocation and number of programme elements in each category amenable to policy consideration at each session are constrained by two primary factors: the duration of the sessions and the establishment of in-session working groups. The work schedule provided in the annex below is designed to ensure that each programme element is given substantive consideration at least once before the fourth session of IFF. In-session working groups and two-week sessions could allow more time per session to be allocated to any particular programme element and/or substantive discussion of any particular programme element to take place at more than one session. The Forum may wish to take into account that:

(a) While options were formulated for further actions to promote and achieve the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of

forests at the fourth session of IPF, views were expressed that the time was inadequate to fully consider (i) international mechanisms and arrangements as regards forests; (ii) the design and content of such mechanisms and arrangements; and (iii) gaps, overlaps and coordination of existing arrangements. The cross-cutting nature of category III, as proposed in paragraph 12 above, which also includes an integral dimension of all other categories, could greatly benefit from the policy dialogue taking place on the other categories. Accordingly, it would seem useful to invite Governments, while considering matters relating to categories I, II and IV, to accord special attention to identifying elements relevant to category III and to allow time for consideration of category III at each of its sessions;

(b) All categories would need to be reconsidered at the fourth session of the Forum and finalized for the report to the Commission at its eighth session.

18. In view of the above constraints, the Forum may wish to encourage as much additional valuable input as possible through, for example, reports of expert groups convened by Governments and background documentation prepared by experts. IPF recognized the importance of regional approaches in addressing forest-related issues. In this context, regional consultations concerning the identification of possible elements of and work towards consensus on international arrangements and mechanisms might be of particular relevance.

V. SECRETARIAT AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS

19. The Economic and Social Council, by resolution 1997/65, decided that the Forum should be serviced by a small secretariat within the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, supported by voluntary extrabudgetary contributions from Governments and international organizations. The operation of the Forum would require funding to support activities as well as meetings and participation by representatives of developing countries and major groups from developing countries. The participation of major groups should be in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Commission. In this regard, the Council decided that the following sources of funding should be considered:

(a) Voluntary extrabudgetary contributions from Governments and international organizations to support the work of the Forum;

(b) Secondments from international organizations;

(c) In-kind contributions from countries and international organizations, including the hosting of meetings.

20. The Council encouraged interested Governments and organizations to make early voluntary contributions to ensure that the work of the Forum started quickly.

21. The Council recommended that support from the United Nations system should, as far as possible, be derived from the reallocation of resources within

existing budgets of United Nations bodies in order to respond to high-priority activities.

VI. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

22. After considering the suggestions contained in the preceding sections, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests may wish to decide on:

(a) The election of the officers of the Forum;

(b) The programme of work of the Forum until the eighth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(c) The number, venue and duration of the substantive sessions of the Forum;

(d) The session schedule;

(e) The work schedule and allocation of programme elements to receive substantive discussion at each session;

(f) In-session working groups.

Annex

WORK SCHEDULE OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS

Category/programme element*		Second session	Third session	Fourth session
			Preparation of IFF interim report to CSD (seventh session)	Preparation of IFF report to CSD (eighth session)
I.a.	Promote and facilitate implementation	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Information and/or background	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
I.b.	Monitor progress in implementation	Information and/or background	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
II.a.	Consider matters left pending on finance	Information and/or background	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
II.b.	Consider matters left pending on trade and environment	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Information and/or background	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
III.	Identify elements, build a global consensus and engage in further action	Substantive discussion	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
IV.a.	Examine research, technology development and improved utilization	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Information and/or background	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)
IV.b.	Examine meeting future needs for goods, services and social requirements	Information and/or background	Substantive discussion Preparation of draft conclusions and proposals for action	Consideration for report to CSD (eighth session)

* See para. 12 above.